

**(Washington, DC)** Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) introduced a resolution expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the policy of the United States on wild animals at the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). **(Please find attached a copy of the legislation)**

CITES was created in 1973 to regulate international trade in endangered species to ensure that it does not threaten their survival. Launched with a few signatory nations, CITES has now 175 parties that have an international obligation and responsibility to protect endangered animals and plants worldwide. Adherence to these protective measures has proven to have benefited the conservation of animals and plants worldwide.

“Unfortunately, more and more species are at risk of extinction and international trade, both legal and illegal, has exacerbated the dangers. International wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars a year and to include hundreds of millions of live plants and animals and derived products such as food, leather, fur, ivory, and timber. Such high levels of exploitation of and trade in wild animals and plants, together with other factors such as habitat loss, are capable of bringing some species close to extinction,” said Hastings.

Between 1979 and 1989 more than 600,000 African elephants were killed for their ivory, cutting the continent’s population in half. Nevertheless, poaching has continued with an estimated 38,000 elephants killed annually and 23.2 tons of poached ivory seized since 2007. As sea ice declines, polar bears will not be able to adapt to a terrestrial-based life resulting in increased mortality, reduced reproduction, increased human-bear conflicts, and overall drastic decline of populations. Bobcats keep being poached for their skins. Several sharks are being severely depleted with declines as high as 99 percent in some areas as a result of the high demand for their fins and meat. Overfishing, increased consumer demand and inadequate enforcement of infractions have led to historically low populations of bluefin tuna.

This month, CITES’ signatory nations will meet for the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to review the status of species in danger of extinction and establish trade restrictions. The Conference will consider proposals offered by several countries to either enhance protections of

endangered species or to remove or downlist some animals from the endangered species listings and reauthorize international trade.

“Several countries which benefit from trade of animals’ derived products, such as elephants’ ivory, sharks’ fins or bluefin tunas’ meat, are putting economic interests before wild animals’ survival, risking to bring species close to extinction. This is unacceptable. My resolution will help preserve many endangered animals by urging CITES to accept proposals that protect these species and oppose those proposals that put them in greater danger.”

“The United States has a moral obligation to protect endangered species and their natural habitat. Wild animals are a very important part of our commonly held natural resources and contribute to the diversity and stability of our environment. We must continue to maintain a balanced and healthy ecosystem that allows for the coexistence of both human beings and the world’s most incredible species,” further noted Hastings.

**Joining Hastings as original co-sponsors of the legislation include:** Representatives Barbara Lee, Eni F. H. Faleomavaega and Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

**Endorsing organization:** the Animal Welfare Institute.

*Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.*

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